NCA
VOC FOR IOP/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 1-0876 JUNE 2, 1976
WILLIAM WADE/LONDON

AFTER THE COD WAR

ANNCR:

THE COD WAR BETWEEN BRITAIN AND ICELAND HAS ENDED, WITH ICELAND GETTING MOST OF WHAT IT WANTED IN THE FISHING DISPUTE. FROM LONDON, VOA CORRESPONDENT WILLIAM WADE REVIEWS THE BACKGROUND AND LOOKS AT SOME PROBLEMS AHEAD:

VOICE:

THE END OF THE COD WAR BETWEEN ICELAND AND BRITAIN HAS BROUGHT SIGHS OF RELIEF IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC ALLIANCE. IT WAS A FESTERING ECONOMIC DISPUTE WITH A POTENTIAL FOR FAR GREATER POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC MISCHIEF.

ICELAND, POPULATION TWO HUNDRED AND TWENTY THOUSAND, HAS BEEN PRESSING HARDER AND HARDER ON ITS MOST VALUABLE NATURAL RESOURCE -- THE FISH IN THE SEAS AROUND ITS SHORES. FOREIGN FISHERMEN WERE DOING THE SAME -- WITH BRITISH TRAWLERMEN TAKING LARGE CATCHES OF COD, THE MOST THREATENED FISH, BACK TO A BIG TRADITIONAL MARKET -- BRITAIN'S FISH AND CHIPS SHOPS. WITH NINE THOUSAND JOBS AT STAKE, THE BRITISH FISHING PORTS OF HULL AND GRIMSBY -- POPULATION THREE HUNDRED EIGHTY THOUSAND -- WERE RELUCTANT TO GIVE UP AN INDUSTRY IN WHICH THEY HAVE A SIZEABLE INVESTMENT. AND THESE TRAWLERMEN ARE NOW BITTER THAT THEY HAVE BEEN SOLD OUT BY THE NEW AGREEMENT SIGNED IN OSLO THAT SEVERELY LIMITS FUTURE BRITISH CATCHES.

ICELAND, THE BRITISH SAY, SUCCESSFULLY CAST ITSELF AS DAVID AGAINST THE BRITISH GOLIATH -- AND WON RECOGNITION FOR ITS UNILATERALLY DECLARED TWO-HUNDRED MILE FISHING ZONE. THE LESSON DRAWN FROM THE COD WAR BY THE DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

OF THE LONDON TIMES IS THAT IN TODAY'S WORLD, MEDIUM-SIZED COUNTRIES COME OFF WORST. GUNBOAT DIPLOMACY, HE SAYS, WORKS ONLY FOR THE VERY BIG POWERS OR THE VERY SMALL.

BUT THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THAT. ICELAND PLAYED ITS STRATEGIC CARD WELL. ITS THREAT TO LEAVE NATO WAS WORRISOME IN TWO PREVIOUS COD WARS AND IS EVEN MORE SO WITH THE RECENT BUILDUP OF THE SOVIET NAVY. NORWAY, HOST TO THE ANGLO-ICELANDIC NEGOTIATIONS, IS CONSCIOUS THAT THE SOVIET PORT OF MURMANSK HAS BECOME ONE OF THE BIGGEST, IF NOT THE BIGGEST, NUCLEAR NAVAL BASES IN THE WORLD. THE NORWEGIANS THEMSELVES HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN LOW-KEY, CAUTIOUS TALKS WITH SOVIET OFFICIALS ABOUT THEIR SEA FRONTIERS WITH THE SOVIET UNION. AND NORWAY IS AMONG THE GROWING NUMBER OF COUNTRIES WHICH FAVOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TWO-HUNDRED MILE ECONOMIC ZONES OFF THEIR SHORES.

IT IS THIS TREND AT THE U.N.'S LAW OF THE SEA CONFERENCE THAT HAS DONE MORE TO SUPPORT ICELAND'S UNILATERALLY DECLARED FISHING ZONE THAN ANYTHING ELSE. AND IT IS A TREND THAT HAS OTHER NATIONS, BRITAIN INCLUDED, CONSIDERING THE PROSPECT OF A NEW ROUND OF MAP DRAFTING AND RULE MAKING FOR THE WORLD'S SEAS.

GH/RCS